



News Release

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Soil from Yakima County tests positive for fungus that causes Valley Fever

Recent tests expand the area now known to have the Valley Fever fungus

OLYMPIA -- Recent soil and dust samples from several sites in south-central Washington have tested positive for the fungus that causes Valley Fever and for the first time positive samples were found in Yakima County. The Washington State Department of Health, Yakima Health District, and Benton-Franklin Health District have been working together to understand where the fungus is present and what soil types will support its growth in Washington state.

A total of nine human cases of Valley Fever have been reported from Yakima (4), Benton (3), Franklin (1), and Walla Walla (1) counties since 2010. Soil sampling was initiated as a result of illness reports; samples from several sites in Benton County previously tested positive for the fungus.

While the risk of becoming infected in Washington is thought to be low, soil testing helps health officials identify where the fungus is located, where ill people might have been exposed, and what environmental conditions the fungus needs to survive. This helps develop information that can be given to local residents and health care providers to better inform diagnosis of the condition. A positive soil test does not necessarily mean the fungus is currently “alive” in the soil; rather it indicates that at some point the fungus was there. A laboratory culture test is used to see if the fungus is actually alive.

People who inhale the fungus from soil can develop coccidioidomycosis – commonly known as Valley Fever. Most people who are exposed to the fungus never have symptoms. Other people may experience symptoms such as fever, fatigue, cough, shortness of breath, headache, and body or joint aches, night sweats, or rash that usually go away on their own after a few weeks. Less commonly, people can develop more severe disease including meningitis, bone or joint

infections, skin lesions, or chronic pneumonia. If you think you have Valley fever, talk with your medical provider.

Preventing Valley Fever is difficult, since anyone who breathes the air where the fungus is present can be infected. However, people who dig or disturb soil containing the fungus might reduce exposure by wetting soil to keep dust down, and by using respiratory protection – although respirators are not proven to prevent infection, they may reduce risk. The best way to protect yourself is to know the symptoms of Valley Fever and if you have them, ask your doctor to test you. Antifungal medications are available, although most people will get better without any treatment. The infection can't be transmitted from person to person or from animals to people.

Health officials want people to remember that the benefits of outdoor activities outweigh the very low risk of infection from the fungus, and so the Department of Health does not recommend limiting outdoor activities.

The Washington State Department of Health continues to track fungal diseases in Washington and raise awareness that there is a low risk for contracting Valley Fever in parts of Washington. Samples are sent to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for testing. For more information please visit the agency's [Valley Fever website](#).

The [Department of Health website](#) (doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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